

DESCRIPTION

ELECTROSTATICALLY ATOMIZING DEVICE

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to an electrostatic atomizing device for emitting water in the form of tiny ionized particles.

BACKGROUND ART

Japanese Patent Publication JP 2001-286546 discloses a prior electrostatically atomizing device. The device includes a nozzle for atomization of water, an electrode disposed in close vicinity of a nozzle end to apply a high voltage across the nozzle and the electrode in order to transform the water into tiny ionized water particles. The device necessitates an atomizing mechanism for emitting the water from the nozzle.

Japanese Patent Publication JP 3260150 discloses another prior electrostatically atomizing device. The atomizing device utilizes a capillary structure made of a metal, glass or plastic material as a water carrier, in place of the atomizing structure, in order to feed the water towards an emitter end of the carrier by a capillary effect. A high voltage is applied to the emitter end so as to charge the water and emit the water in the form of ionized particles from the emitter end. When the water contains minerals such as Ca or Mg, the minerals will advance to the distal end of the capillary structure and react with CO_2 in the air to precipitate as CaCO_3 or MgO , which hinders the electrostatic atomization. Therefore, it has been a problem to require maintenance of removing the precipitants regularly.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

[Problem to be solved by the Invention]

The present invention has been achieved to overcome the above problem and to present an electrostatically atomizing device which utilizes a capillary structure as a water carrier but can avoid the precipitation of minerals at the emitter end of the carrier, thereby enabling stable electrostatically atomization over a long period of use.

[Means for solving the problem]

The electrostatically atomizing device of the present invention includes a capillary carrier having a water collecting end and an emitter end opposite of the water collecting end, the water collecting end collecting the water for feeding it to the emitter end. The device includes a first electrode for charging the water at the emitter end, and a second electrode opposed to the emitter end. The first and second electrodes are connected to a voltage source which applies a voltage across the first and second electrodes to charge the water at the emitter end and emit it in the form of tiny ionized particles. The characterizing feature of the present invention resides in the provision of a cation exchanger configured to remove mineral ions from the water being fed to the emitter end. Accordingly, when the water contains minerals such as Ca or Mg, the water can be fed to the emitter end by the capillary effect while being removed of minerals, preventing the minerals from precipitating at the emitter end. Accordingly, frequent cleaning of the emitter end can be avoided to keep the stable electrostatic atomization over a long period of use.

Preferably, the capillary carrier is made of a cation exchange material to

define itself the cation exchanger. Thus, there is no need to add the cation exchanger, minimizing the number of assembly parts for improved productivity.

When the cation exchanger is added to the capillary carrier, it is preferred to fit around the capillary carrier at a portion upstream of the emitter end. With this arrangement, it is easy to remove the undesired minerals from the water advancing from the water collecting end to the emitter end through the capillary carrier, thereby effectively preventing the minerals from advancing to the emitter end.

Further, it is equally possible to provide the cation exchanger on the side of a tank. An auxiliary vessel is attached to the tank to contain the cation exchanger in contact with the water. In this case, the cation exchanger may be prepared in the form of a plurality of granules of ion exchange material, stacked sheets of the ion exchange material, or a spiral sheet of the ion exchange material.

These and still other advantageous features of the present invention will become more apparent from the following description of an embodiment when taken in conjunction with the attached drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an electrostatically atomizing device in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a vertical section of the above device;

FIG. 3 is a schematic view illustrating the operation of the above device;

FIG. 4 is a top view of an electrode plate employed in the above device;

FIG. 5 is a front view of a modified capillary carrier utilized in the above device;

FIG. 6 is a vertical section of an electrostatically atomizing device in accordance

with another embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is a sectional view of an auxiliary vessel containing a cation exchanger utilized in the above device;

FIG. 8 is a sectional view of another cation exchanger contained in the auxiliary vessel utilized in the above device; and

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of a further cation exchanger contained in the auxiliary vessel utilized in the above device.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

An electrostatically atomizing device in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention is designed to ionize particulate water so as to generate ionized water particles of a nanometer size. As shown in FIGS. 1 to 3, the electrostatically atomizing device includes a base **10** mounting a plurality of capillary carriers **20**, a barrel **30** surrounding the top of the base **10**, an electrode plate **40** fitted in a top opening of the barrel **30**, and a tank **50** detachable to the lower end of the base **10**. Each capillary carrier **20** is prepared in the form of a porous bar of 5 mm diameter and 70 mm length, and extends through the base **10**. The top end of the capillary carrier **20** projecting above the base **10** is sharpened to define an emitter end **21**, while the portion below the base **10** define a water collecting end **22**. The water collecting end **22** is immersed in the water of the tank **50** to suck up the water and feed it to the emitter end **21** by the capillary action.

The base **10** is molded from an electrically conductive plastic material to define a first electrode which gives a certain electric potential to each of the capillary carriers **20**. The base **10** is formed at its one circumferential portion

with a terminal **12** for connection with a high voltage source **70**. An electrode tube **14** extends from the lower side of the base **10** to charge the water to the same potential as the capillary carrier **20**.

The high voltage source **70** is configured to apply the high voltage to give an electric field strength of 500 V/mm, for example, between the base **10** and the electrode plate **40**, developing an electrostatic atomization between the emitter end **21** of the capillary carrier **20** and the electrode plate **40** defining the second electrode, such that tiny ionized water particles are emitted from the emitter end **21** towards the electrode plate **40**. That is, the high voltage induces Rayleigh disintegration of the water being emitted from the emitter end **21**, thereby generating negatively-charged water particles and emitting the mist of the tiny ionized water particles.

The electrode plate **40** is molded from an electrically conductive plastic material to have a circular circumference and to have a center opening with peripheral brim **41**. The brim **41** is juxtaposed to the emitter end **21** of each capillary carrier **20** to enable an electric discharge between the brim **41** and the emitter end **21**. The electrode plate **40** is formed at a portion on its circumference with a terminal **48** for connection with the high voltage source. The high voltage source applies continuous or pulsating high voltage across the electrode plate **40** and the base **10**.

The base **10** supports at its center an ionizing needle **60** which has a pointed end projecting above the base **10** to the same height as the emitter end of the capillary carrier **20** and is electrically charged to the same potential as the capillary carriers **20**. As shown in FIG. 4, the capillary carriers **20** are evenly spaced on a circumference of a circle concentric to the ionizing needle **60**. The

peripheral brim **41** of the electrode plate **40**, which define an opposed electrode common to the capillary carrier **20** and the ionizing needle **60**, is configured to have a plurality of continuous arc edges **42**. Each of the arc edges **42** is curved into a semi-circular edge centered on the emitter end **21** of each capillary carrier **20** so as to be spaced from the emitter end by a constant distance. The adjacent arc edges **42** define therebetween a second edge **44** which is opposed to the ionizing needle **60** by a shortest distance in order to cause a corona discharge therebetween, thereby negatively charging molecules such as oxygen, oxide, or nitride in the air for generating negatively charged ions, while restraining the generation of ozone. That is, the distance R2 between the second edge **44** and the ionizing needle **60** is made greater than the distance R1 between the first arc edge **42** and the emitter end **21**, enabling the atomization at the emitter end **21** and the generation of negatively charged ions at the ionizing needle **60** respectively at optimum conditions, while applying the same high negative voltage commonly to the ionizing needle **60** and the emitter end **21** of the capillary carrier **20**.

The capillary carriers **20** is made of resin a fiber resin having cation exchange capability and is shaped into a porous body having a porosity of 10 to 70 % in order to feed the water towards the emitter end **21** by the capillary effect using minute internal paths. The fiber resin having the cation exchange capability is fabricated from an ion exchange resin of a sodium ion exchange type or hydrogen ion exchange type. When using sodium ion exchange type, Ca^{2+} and Mg^{2+} contained in the water are exchanged by Na^+ and absorbed. When using hydrogen ion exchange type, Ca^{2+} and Mg^{2+} are exchanged by H^+ and absorbed. Thus, the capillary carrier **20** defines itself the cation exchanger **80**

so that it can remove such minerals contained in the water while the water is being fed from the collecting end **22** to the emitter end **21**. Consequently, the minerals can be well prevented from reaching the emitter end **21** of the capillary carrier **20**, thereby being kept free from reacting with CO_2 in the surrounding air, and therefore being avoided from precipitating as MgO or CaCO_3 , which would otherwise hinder the electrostatic atomization.

When the cation exchanger of the hydrogen ion exchange type is utilized, it is preferred to use an anion exchanger in combination in order to balance pH of the water. In this instance, the anion exchanger may be made of fiber to constitute a part of the capillary carrier **20** or may be provided separately from the capillary carrier **20** to be deposited in the tank **50**. When the anion exchanger constitutes the part of the capillary carrier **20**, it is located on the side of the emitter end **21**.

FIG. 5 illustrates a modification in which the cation exchanger **70A** is provided separately from the capillary carrier **20A**. In this case, the capillary carrier **20A** is made of porous ceramic to have internal minute paths through which the water is fed towards the emitter end by the capillary effect. The ceramic is selected from one or any combination of alumina, titania, zirconia, silica, and magnesia. The cation exchanger **70A** is made of the fiber resin and is shaped into a cylinder which surrounds closely around the capillary carrier **20A** at a portion upstream of the emitter end **21A**. Thus, the ion exchange is made to remove the minerals contained in the water advancing from the water collecting end **22A** to the emitter end **21A**.

The barrel **30** is formed in its circumferential wall with a plurality of openings **32** which introduce the air to cause the air flow being discharged from

through the center opening of the electrode plate **40** such that the tiny ionized water particles generated between the emitter end **21** and the electrode plate **40** are carried on the air flow and spread in the form of a mist into a wide space.

When the mist of the tiny ionized water particles caused by the electrostatic atomization is being generated at a rate of 0.02 ml/m within an electric field strength of 500 V/mm or more with the use of the capillary carrier **20** of which tip diameter is 0.5 mm or below, the mist contains the very fine ionized particles having the nanometer particle size of 3 to 100 nm, which react with the oxygen in the air to give the radicals such as hydroxyl radicals, superoxides, nitrogen monoxide radicals, and oxygen radicals. The mist of the tiny ionized water particles, when released into a room, can deodorize substances contained in the air or adhered to the walls.

FIG. 6 illustrates another embodiment in which an auxiliary vessel **52** is provided at the lower end of the tank **50** to contain the cation exchanger **70B**. The other structures are identical to the above embodiment so that the same reference numerals apply to the same parts and no duplicate explanation is made herein. The auxiliary vessel **52** has a top opening which detachably receives the lower end of the tank **50B** to take in the portion of the water through a plurality of holes **51** in the bottom of the tank **50B**. As shown in FIG. 7, the cation exchanger **70B** is prepared in the form of a plurality of granules made of the ion exchange resin to come into contact with the water in the auxiliary vessel **52**. Thus, the cation exchanger **70B** absorbs the minerals contained in the water within the tank, inhibiting the minerals from being fed to the capillary carrier **20** and therefore effectively preventing the precipitation of CaCO_3 or MgO at the emitter end **21**.

The cation exchanger may be provided as a stack of plural sheets **70C** as shown in FIG. 8, or as a spirally wound sheet **70D** as shown in FIG. 9, to be accommodated within the auxiliary vessel **52**. In this case, the fiber of ion exchange resin is used to fabricate a porous sheet which has an increased contact surface area with the water for improving the ion exchange capability.

As seen in the present embodiment where the cation exchanger is provided on the side of the tank **50B**, the capillary carrier **20** is not necessarily made to have the cation exchange capability, and may be molded from a porous ceramic.

When the detachable auxiliary vessel **52** is utilized, it is easy to recycle the cation exchanger by detaching the vessel from the tank **50B**. Also, since the tank **50B** is detachable to the base **10**, the cation exchanger may be contained in the tank **50B** in contact with the water in the tank without relying upon the auxiliary vessel. In this case, the cation exchanger is preferred to be held in a net bag to be easily taken out of the tank.

The above embodiments and modifications are illustrated only for appropriately disclosing the present invention, and any combination of the features disclosed herein should be interpreted to be within the scope of the present invention.